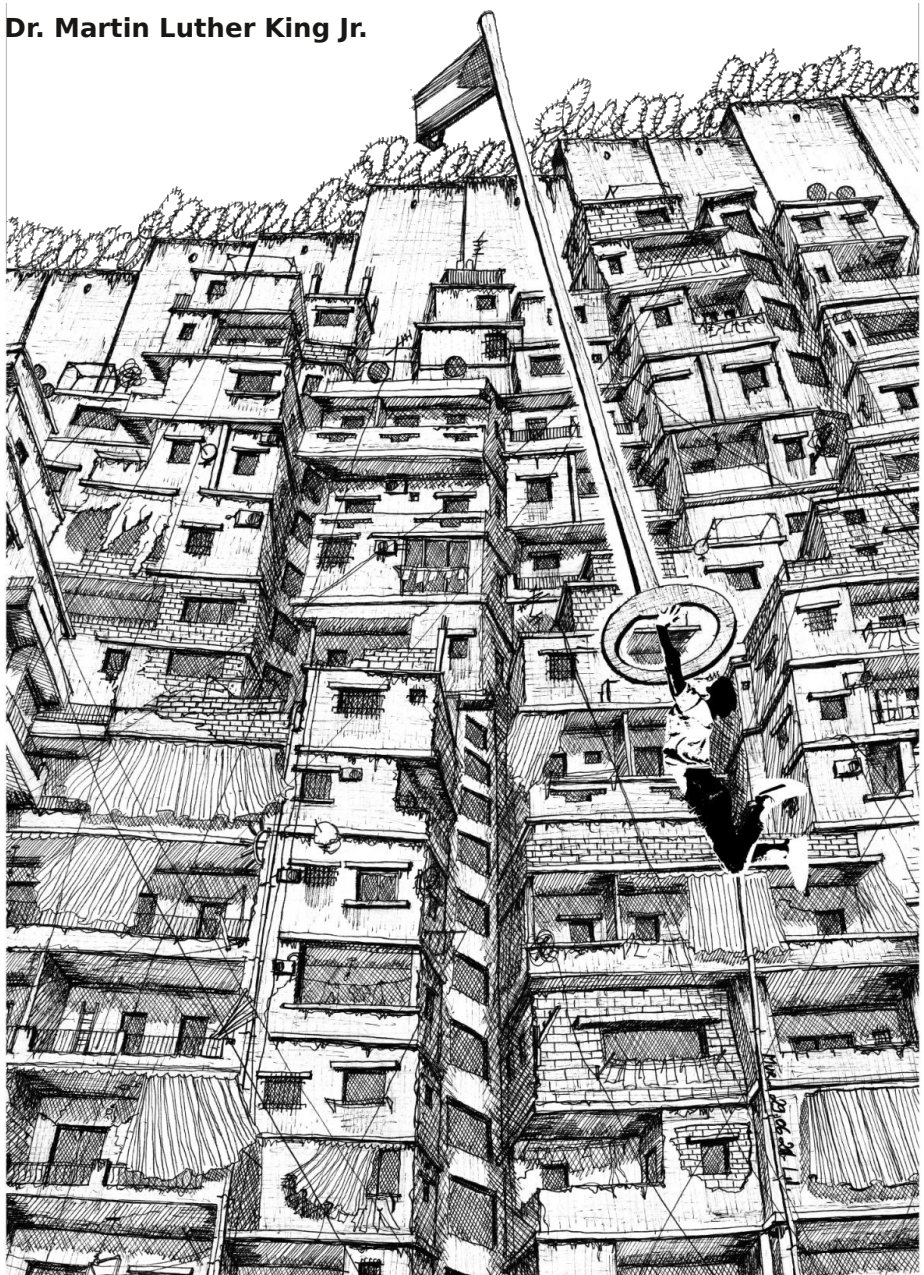
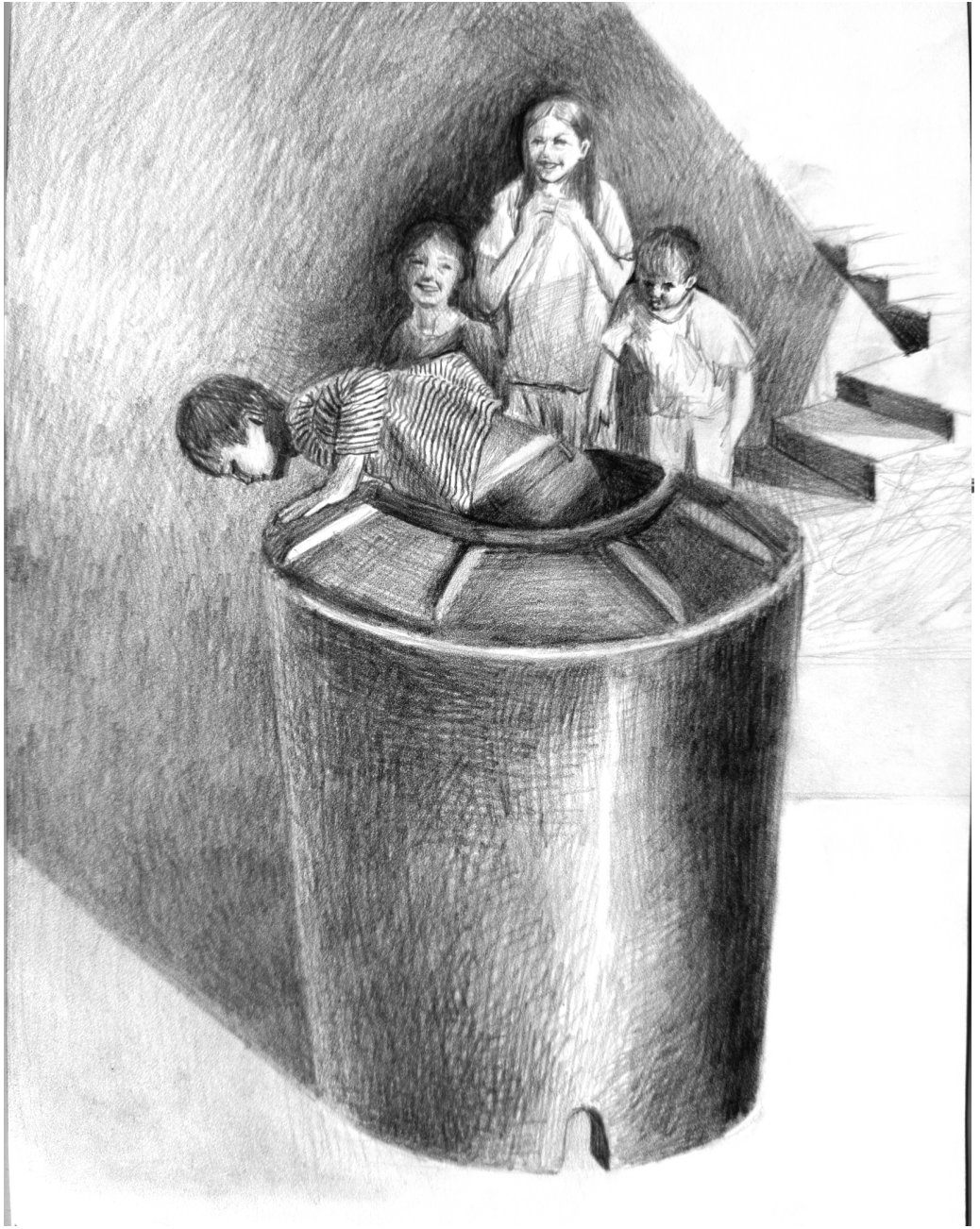
We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. What affects one directly, affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in the world, no one can be totally healthy... Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



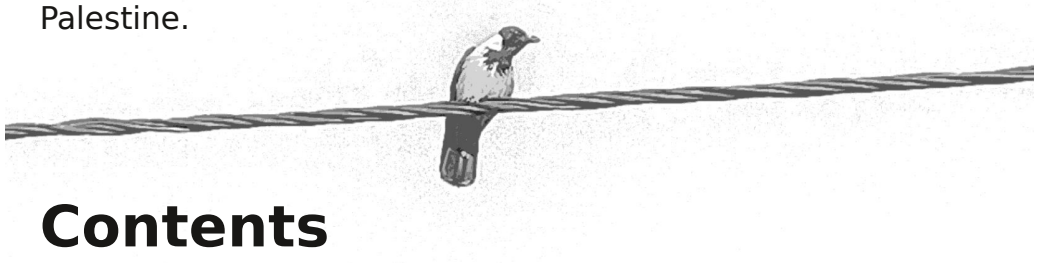


From the River...

Essays on Solidarity Work in Palestine

This zine is an introductory primer on solidarity work in the West Bank of Palestine. Though others may find the info useful or interesting, the instructional sections are written from the experience of U.S.Americans, so are biased towards U.S. -> Palestine solidarity work.

Guidance and essays were all written in the summer of 2026. We encourage all readers to seek updated info about Palestine.



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Art sourced from:
- The Palestine Poster Project
- Tirazain Embroidery
- Images and drawings from solidarity workers OTG and at home

Choosing a Solidarity Org

Solidarity work organizations in the West Bank have a broad range of values, organizational structures, and ways of interacting with native Palestinians. There can be significant tensions between and within some orgs, as well as complicated dynamics between orgs and the people they support. Solidarity orgs are generally more effective at fundraising than both individual internationals, and Palestinian orgs and individuals. They often have a larger economic footprint than the towns which they operate in, and their presence poses big questions of visibility and access.

The following are relevant questions you may ask representatives of an org before choosing to join:

What is the decision making structure of your organization?
- vertical/horizontal?
- Palestinian/international led?

Do you have full financial transparency?
- can you show me documentation?

How do you prioritize calls for protective presence by West Bank households?
- where do you not operate?
- why?

How do you coordinate with other solidarity orgs on the ground?
- can I move between yours and other solidarity orgs?

What support can I expect from you if I am on the ground as an independent solidarity worker?

How do you handle conflict/criticism within your organization?
- Can you give me any concrete examples of your accountability process?

Digital Alibis

Preparing to Empty your Virtual Pockets

Assume that your name will be searched online and on popular social media platforms if you are interrogated. Search your own name in a browser, and on social media to be sure nothing comes up which will set off alarms. If you have an active political social media account which is associated with your legal name, you may temporarily change the account name or scrub the account of political content.

It is likely that border guards will ask you to unlock your phone and hand it over to them during an interrogation. Should they conduct a rigorous search, they are likely to check for the following:

- Privacy focused apps (Signal, VPNs, etc...)
- App store history showing that you've had suspicious apps installed in the past
- Political content in text exchanges
- Political content in your images/videos
- Emails from political orgs
- Online search history
- Open social media profiles
- Social media feeds
- etc...

Be VERY thorough when cleaning your phone. Some solidarity workers have successfully refused access to their phones, but this is likely to raise suspicions.

The Nature of Solidarity Work

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

— Lilla Watson, Murri activist, artist, and academic

Our definition of solidarity work:

Labor which pursues the liberation of another element (be that a species, demographic, ecology, etc...), guided by the principle that any step towards liberation is collective.

Examples include: resource sharing, ecological defense, reciprocal education.

We do not engage in solidarity out of selfishness or selflessness, but with the assumption that systemic oppression is best addressed collectively, and by informed and coordinated methods.

Note:

This zine is concerned specifically with on the ground solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank. It will not address the myriad other forms of solidarity, most of which happen without international travel.

Why do we (internationals) depend on a free Palestine?

- For their modeling of new and old forms of resistance. By listening to and observing them, we can improve our tactics at home
- For the ecological defense of SWANA (Southwest Asia & North Africa) against extractive colonialism
- For the political defense of SWANA against the same capitalist and imperialist interests which we combat at home

To realize these last two goals, the indigenous people of SWANA must be empowered to perpetuate their cultural heritage, and retain stewardship of their ancestral lands.

Why do Palestinians depend on us?

- For the same reasons as above
- For our sovereignty from Israel
- For our access to wealth and social privilege

Elements of Solidarity Work

Forming relationships:

Solidarity is not only a material issue, but a process of fostering spiritual and emotional connections which enrich life and the work of liberation. Creating friends, comrades, and allies grows a global network of resistance which is more than purely ideological, and presents the occupation with a broader and more adaptive front. These relationships cannot be standardized, and require care and intention given the chasms of experience they may span.

Protective presence:

In this case, protective presence means wielding non-Palestinian citizenship (and almost always a camera) to prevent or minimize instances of violence by the occupation. This is one of the most lauded facets of solidarity work in the West Bank, largely because it proliferates a spectacle both of settler/military attacks, and (often white) international's presence at them. It is, however, a sought after form of support by West Bank Palestinians, and has an obvious qualitative impact on both their physical safety and quality of life. Many have cited its effectiveness at reducing police/settler/IOF violence, arrests, and property damage.

Contributing labor:

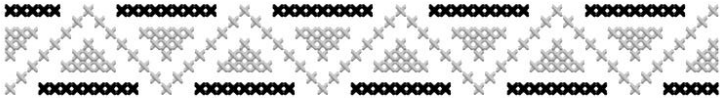
Palestinians need enormous strength to resist the occupation, and strength over time (especially spanning generations) requires rest. We as solidarity workers can provide rest by aiding in mundane work such as harvesting, childcare, construction, etc...

Contributing materials:

Palestine has been economically and politically severed from the rest of the world, resulting in a destitute job market. While some people still have income, businesses, and subsistence farms, all of these are directly and indirectly threatened by the occupation. As citizens of the imperial core, we have a proximity to wealth which allows us to fundraise much more effectively than the rest of the global population. Relatively small amount of money (on the order of a couple hundred/thousand dollars) can sometimes be the difference between a family remaining in a contested area, or being forced to leave for refugee camps or population centers. While on the ground, this can sometimes mean buying and distributing material resources to families who will not accept cash.

Analogue Alibis

Forming "Healthy Relationships" with Border Control Cops



The '48 can be very suspicious of foreigners, and entry interviews (varying from a couple passing questions to full searches and hours-long interrogations) are unpredictable. Sometimes travelers, especially those who are ill prepared, will be offered very short visas or be rejected entry entirely. You should be able to explain every item in your luggage, and list (with reasonable confidence) every point on a fabricated tourist itinerary. Expect to be asked to prove everything you say, and consider how you will fabricate an itinerary you can show them (solutions include a calendar, a simple list, or printed out hostel reservations). Prep for border crossings is often the most time and effort intensive part of this work, as the result is make or break for your trip.

Interrogators are trained to throw you off and make you uncomfortable, so it's best to tell a simple story that's as close as possible to the truth. They are likely to try to goad you into revealing any amount of political bias, so unless you want to play a Zionist, feign complete ignorance. Avoid any language (including the word Zionism or even Palestine), which would indicate that you have anything more than a public middle school level education in geopolitics.

Though we found them difficult to source, a citizen of the '48 who will vouch for you personally or professionally (someone you will say you intend to meet or stay with) has been said to be beneficial when crossing. If you're able to find someone who you trust will answer their phone and put in a good word, great; if not, don't worry about it.

Finally, when you have your story, seek out a friend willing to role-play an aggressive interrogator. If you aren't a proficient liar, this is a great way to practice.

Common interrogation questions:

- Why have you come?
- Why are you going there?
- Why not choose another country?
- What is your ethnicity and religion?
- Where are you staying?
- What do you do for work?

Travel to the West Bank

NOTE: As is common among some Palestinian communities, we will refer here to Israel as the '48. We choose this language because it delineates the current occupier state (established in 1948 as a continuation of the European colonial project in SWANA) from religious and cultural imagery which was co-opted by it.

Organization, or Independent?

Most people doing solidarity work in the West Bank travel with an existing Palestine solidarity organization. When you work with an org you'll receive valuable training, resources, and OTG coordination. Some people (including some contributors to this publication) worked independently of any org. We only recommend independent work if you are connected to a robust network (at least a handful of people who you trust) of both Palestinians and solidarity workers that will prepare you to be OTG, support you while you're there, and support you after you return. For info on orgs, see the last page.

Time and Money:

Given the time it takes to adapt to the work, we recommend planning for no less than a 3 week stay in the West Bank. When you first enter the '48 (or if you enter directly into the West Bank from Jordan), you will be issued a tourist visa which will last no longer than 3 months. Some volunteers have been able to extend their stay by leaving for a neighboring state, waiting 1 week, then coming back.

We recommend budgeting no less than $300/month ($10/day) for your personal expenses (food, toiletries, busses, etc...) assuming that you are paying no rent, but making occasional contributions to your host's household in the form of food or cash. Add to this your travel expenses, and the cost of any additional supplies.

Supplies:

Pack light and don't over think it. Everything you need to survive in Palestine can be found in Palestine. You must have:

- Any medications/aids you rely on
- A passport
- A reliable smartphone (carrier unlocked)

Routes:

Airports and border crossings in SWANA are subject to closure, especially during open war. Be prepared to change your plans, and don't book flights too far in advance. The 3 most reliable points of access to the West Bank are:

1) Fly into Amman, Jordan and cross at the King Hussein bridge
2) Fly into Cairo, Egypt and cross into the '48 at Taba
3) Fly into Tel Aviv

Publicizing:

When we talk about this work in political spaces in America, so often the response we hear is "You can get into Palestine?" Meanwhile, in Palestine we hear over and over from different families "When are more people coming here to help?"

We learned about this work from our activist friends who came before us. They hosted report backs at events and radical spaces, discussing the value of the work and how to participate in it. While we were on the ground, we saw one protective presence org do collaborative outreach with other pro-Palestine orgs and receive almost 400 applications for participation! It seems that there are so many more people ready to do solidarity work than there are that know it exists. If this is powerful and widely needed direct action, as the Palestinian community we encounter say it is, so is the work of bringing in as many people to do it as we can.

Remote Support:

There is parallel work you can do even if you never set foot in Palestine. Some solidarity orgs eagerly seek applicants for remote work, not just on the ground volunteers. With or without joining these orgs, you can advocate for protective presence work in many ways.

you can:
-Join the outreach team of an existing protective presence org
-Start discussions about the work at events and public spaces
-Seek out and invite volunteers who have done the work to speak in your spaces
-Signal boost on social media

Whatever form of work you choose, we encourage you to do it collectively, and with some structure, so that it results not only in a few spikes of international visits to Palestine, but an organic, growing solidarity presence in response to the requests of these steadfast people resisting genocide.

Interview with a Mother of Masafer Yatta

Note: this interview was conducted with translation software on a smartphone. The result is an imperfect translation, not only in the final product, but between the interviewer and interviewee.

Interviewer: What do you think is the best way for volunteers to help people from the West Bank survive the occupation?

Mother: The best way is for foreigners to come here to take pictures and send them abroad so they can see what the occupation is doing to us and what the settlers are doing to us. Like me, my family, they killed my son in front of my eyes, and then they want to take my land, they want to take my house, they took my car, they set up a court for me, meaning they destroyed us from all sides. I mean that many times they assaulted my husband. They assaulted me by beating me. I mean, I am afraid that one day they will kill my husband. I mean, just like they killed my son, they will kill my husband or kill my daughter or kill me. I am so afraid and worried about the situation.

Interviewer: We fear this also. We understand that we cannot come here and end the occupation, that there is little that we can give you that you do not have, meaning strength and courage. it is a desperate hope that cameras and words will help, but that is why we came.

Mother: People can help us too, I mean, collect donations, for example, if you can collect donations for our family, because the situation we are living in is difficult, I mean, I can’t get a gas cylinder, I can’t get sugar, I can't get flour, everything is difficult, I mean, if I work I get money, if I don’t work I don't have money, and my husband is sick, he has kidney and heart problems, and work, he can’t do anything for me.

Every Israeli must wonder when the regional supremacy of their state will evaporate, so every day must be Flag Day. If, for a year, the youth refused to be drafted, for a day, corporations refused to invest, the project would be over. People must continue to believe that, surely, if the day of defeat had already come, the walls would be rubble; surely, if collapse were imminent, the troops would be yelling and emptying their magazines; surely, if Palestine were still living, it would be writhing sleeplessly beneath the floodlights. Glassy eyed private security guards and frightened conscripts make up Israel's great military parade, and the laughter of children at dusk is Palestine's reply.

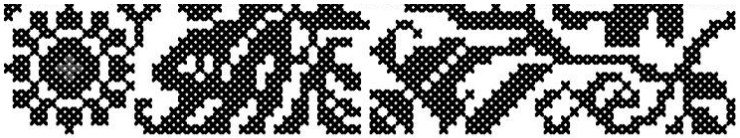
Prison Infrastructure

Qualia

The summer heat is beginning to come in earnest here. Looking down at the valleys, one can see it rippling over the houses and groves of olive trees. Most of the blooms of spring are gone, but the earth is still painted a light green by resilient flora, often bunched and bristling with spines. Most cloud cover is burned off quickly by the sun, but a blessed, dry wind blows irregularly, carrying dust and the smells of livestock. The villages are quieter in midday, and the din of playing children at dusk is louder.

To the west, running along the ridge line, is an access road for the settlement of Avigail; it is studded with security outposts and a line of powerful floodlights which remain on all night. Patrolling armored trucks trace the boundary every 20 minutes or so, and any approaching person is met and questioned by armed private security. This, and tall concrete walls and spires bristling with cameras, are all typical of a settlement in the West Bank. This visage obfuscates that there is no current and direct threat to the settlements and, if there were, these would not be the tools to mitigate it. Whether Palestinians are working their land or mounting some armed resistance (the likes of which does not exist in Masafer Yatta), every colonizer can make a call and have them harassed, arrested, or killed by the army momentarily.

One might imagine that the boundary is to remind Palestinians of their oppression, or inability to escape it, or a ruining of the comfort of their land. But this rings hollow against their attitude and experience: no one can forget the might of the occupation; it announces itself in missing limbs and absent family members - floodlights are a thousand times dimmer than the summer sun, and more easily defeated by window shades. The omnipresent prison architecture of the West Bank is not to protect the settler's body or injure Palestinians, but to to fortify the mind and spirit of the occupation.



Interviewer: We can see that it is an especially great pain that there are no jobs. it is clear that many people here want to work and support themselves rather than relying on the donations of people from other countries. It is clear that people here are proud and do not want to ask for money.

Mother: I wish I had a job, maybe a job at home. If I had the means, I would buy, for example, a cow or a sheep, milk them, make milk, yogurt, cheese, and sell it to earn money, rather than begging from people. If only they who made the documentary that used footage of our family story, had believed my need and given me money, I would have started a small project and lived with my husband and my five daughters. We would have lived the best life. I mean, in the simple project, if only they had given me a little money, but they didn't give me a single shekel. They earned a lot of money from the film, the film made a lot of money, was a success. When the situation became like this because of the occupation, because the settlers started causing a lot of problems with the Arabs, and the army started harassing the people, many residents, and then there was no work, meaning people, because there was no work, became this way. You noticed this thing and saw it at our neighbor's house when they come to him, when the settler comes to him, he hugs his land and trees and just lets their sheep graze. But he wants foreigners to come to help, to stand with him.

Mother: This problem is also a little scary, meaning that we might reach a point where they come and take my daughter from in front of me and I can't do anything for her. The settler might enter my house, take my daughter from in front of me and leave with her and I can't do anything to him, or a child, or my sheep, or anything else. The settlers can do anything to us. And they will do something even worse than this. The settlers and the army protection will do even more. If the situation continues like this, they will do something even more terrible and dirty than this. We will not be able to control the situation, but if we rise up now, we will. It is absolutely necessary, I mean, I am telling you, the entire Palestinian people must stand united and defend their land, defend their homes, defend their state, and defend our rights, otherwise, we will have no rights left and we will be gone. They all have to stand together, meaning all the Palestinians here, all the people, stand together when a settler comes to my house, everyone should come to my aid. I'm telling you, everyone needs to come together and stand united, and everything, for better or for worse, everyone

needs to stand together, help each other, and support each other. My son, my son, why was he shot? Because the army came wanting to take our property. My son stood bravely. Look, the state of Israel wants the land, it doesn't want only Palestinian land, it wants all the land, it wants to take all the land, and it doesn't want anyone to say no to it, it only wants someone to say yes to it and that's it. They hate all Palestinians and they don't want any Palestinian to remain on the land. All their attempts are aimed at uprooting the Palestinians. And now what did they do? They waged war with Iran, and they also waged war with Lebanon. They are malicious. They are doing politics before they can occupy Palestine. The youth and the whole world abandoned the land and went to work in Israel. They left them, meaning they forgot their lands, they forgot agriculture, they forgot farming, they forgot building livestock, sheep and things like that. And the occupation, meaning what they did, did not let them be satisfied in their old role, which was sweet and beautiful. If it was a small house, it was sweet, with affection and warmth, not like now, meaning a big house, but there is no affection, no warmth, and no respect. It was better before, it was a small house, and the family remained big inside it, but there was warmth and affection. I mean, when I was 15 years old, I saw life as better and sweeter than it is now, even though it was simple. Life was simple and sweet, and we used to play without fear or pressure. That's how the occupation was. I have a daughter who saw people being shot in front of her. Even now, she is still afraid. She is afraid at night and during the day. She is afraid of anything called an army or settlers. Sometimes she tells me, "Let's go, we don't want to stay here. What if they come and shoot me like my brother." I want to go crying. Isn't it wrong and unfair that a child like this lives in terror and fear? She is now 10 years old, meaning she was five years old from the day she turned five until today, and she has been living in terror and fear. Isn't this wrong and unfair?

Interviewer: It is wrong and unfair. It is a terrible thing to see when the violence of the state enters people and lives inside of them.

Mother: This is criminal, this is the crime of the occupation. People see the occupation from afar, they don't know what it does up close when people come here. I mean, you came, I saw how many times you saw what the settler did at our neighbor’s house or anywhere in town, anywhere you saw what the settlers do, they attack the house, they attack the land, they attack the tree. But tomorrow when you go back to America and start telling your friends in America, they will never believe this. It only happens when my mother and her family come to Palestine and see it with their own eyes, that they believe it. But when

One Day, One field, Two Attacks

Qualia

Yesterday, a single acre of land was witness to two separate settler attacks in less than 10 hours. These moments mirrored one another, creating a near perfect, infuriatingly ironic image of the occupation's role in Palestinian life. First, in the morning, an Israeli shepherd walked his herd over a kilometer from the settlement of Avigail, crossing tall fields of grass, just to reach an over-grazed hillside less than 200 meters from a Palestinian home. There, he tore down a fence to allow his sheep access to a grove of Palestinian olive trees, which are destroyed by feeding. The army came to chat with him, and threaten the Palestinian family who were protesting his. Then, in the evening, this same settler returned with an older, armed man to forcibly remove a flock and their tending family from the very same field; shoving, yelling, and threatening violence. Authorities arrived after settlers had left; they spoke to no one.

Afterward, I had a conversation with a young member of one of the affected families, who talked about the performative nature of settler violence. He said that the speeches of Ben Gvir and the yelling of West Bank settlers is of the same material, or from the same arrogance. This is a critique of Israelis, as well as an observation of the political through line between two very different types of Israeli activism; Ben Gvir and other politicians write government policy, oversee the execution, rape, and torture of political prisoners, and generally assert Israel's right to persecute genocide from a global platform. These settlers redraw property lines at will, direct local divisions of the army, and assert the supremacy of a Jewish state.

The message from both groups is clear: we can do anything we wish to you - your resistance, like your existence, is a temporary inconvenience at worst. After the evening attack, neighbors sat together and talked, slowly returning to their homes. This morning has been peaceful in Rakeez, and the same Palestinian shepherds rose early in the morning and returned to the same fields as yesterday. Tomorrow, come what may, they will do the same, and millions of dollars and man hours will break against their persistence. To be in solidarity with Palestine is to see through the lie that settler states are all powerful. This does not mean ignorance of what they destroy, but an analysis of their projections of strength, a study of the effective forms of resistance against them.

Resistance and the Destruction of Home

Qualia

Today, I had brunch with two men who's home I have been staying at for the last few nights. The eldest will celebrate his engagement to a woman from Yatta tomorrow, though they may not be married for a long time. When I asked him if he would move to Yatta after the marriage, he said he hadn't decided yet, and that he loves his family's home in Rakeez. That it is beautiful despite all of the violence perpetrated here by the occupation. Despite his father's maiming by bullets and his neighbor's son having been summarily executed by the army. He said that he would die to protect it.

The Masafer Yatta wikipedia page links to another article titled "Firing Zone 918." This article describes the appropriation of 8,000 acres of Palestinian land by the Israeli government for use as a military training area. It is where the regular sound of weapons fire comes from all day and night. It is audible in every Palestinian home that I've stayed in. The article contains a list of villages both inside and bordering the zone. It reads as follows:

"inba, al-Mirkez, al-Halawe, Khallet a-Dab‘a, al-Fakhit, at-Tabban, al-Majaz, a-Sfai/ Sfay (upper/lower), Maghayir al-‘Abeed, al-Mufaqara, a-Tuba, and Sarura (depopulated). OCHA (2022) estimated about 1,150 residents (569 children) at risk in these localities and notes that Sarura and Kharruba ceased to exist following demolitions."

What does it mean for a community of people to cease to exist?
How can one pinpoint the moment at which a place stops being?
What do the people tell later generations who never saw their family homes?
How long after they leave does it remain their home?

These are not abstract questions. Answers exist in the minds of every displaced person alive today. They are not pointless questions, either. They define what home is. If you are interested in the answers to these questions, please consider joining the solidarity work happening now in Masafer Yatta and elsewhere in the West Bank.

you tell them, they will never believe it.

Interviewer: I hear what you are saying. I think people in America believe, but most of them cannot understand. it is impossible to understand without coming here, and even more impossible without spending your life here. Your childhood.

Mother: I am also happy that volunteers like you come to visit Palestine and see what is happening. We are happy that you come to my house and to anyone's house.

Interviewer: I think it is important how you continue to make things beautiful here despite the ugliness of the occupation. Your food, your home, your family are all filled with love. Love is so easy to give up in a difficult situation like this.

Mother: It means that despite the pain and suffering we are going through, we must be strong. We must create, that is, we must have love, affection, respect, and happiness, even if it is simple, in our home for our children. It turns out that we, the Palestinian people, always create love and joy with our hands and our ideas. If we don't think, we don't do anything, but we must think, we must do something.

Solidarity Work

Petra

We met a new family here because of a mistake. Some locals point us to a Palestinian farmhouse on the other side of the valley where three men are herding goats. "Settlers!". We hurry there, only to find out these are just more Palestinian people who live here. We all laugh in relief. A woman offers for us to come back later and stay the night with her family. We played games and music on their porch, with her, her husband, and their preteen daughter. They are a relaxed happy family. There is a peaceful disjointedness. The games are missing pieces, the cheap guitar hurts our fingers, the translation app is slow and often wrong. Who cares? We pass around the guitar and noodle on it, we make pretty patterns on the game boards with the pieces, and we somehow easily lazily get to know each other like good old friends with few words. This is the coziest and simplest I've felt in a while. I forget why we're here, until I remember. I can't believe anyone would attack these people.

An elder told us a story:
As a younger man, he eagerly ran distances to Zionist attacks to defend his community, a little like we do except he stopped them, or tried to, instead of just filming them. He earned a reputation. Zionist settlers hunted him down. They beat him terribly, fracturing many bones. One tried to shoot him, but the gun malfunctioned.

Our host told me a story:
A house is attacked by Zionists. The children are rounded up and forced into a small room. The attackers attempt to gas them. The children are pulled out in time by their families.

I don't really know how to process this, what it would mean to. I see the unfolding of genocide and am drawn to come volunteer here. But what do I really understand emotionally? I'm from America; I was raised to believe that the holocaust and the colonial genocide of the Native Americans are inhuman horrors of the past so deep and clear we'd never forget, never allow them to be real again. We're comfortable, modern, distant. What are we doing?

My inspiring, tireless activist friend has in their Instagram bio "Life is real!". I don't know why it needs to be said, but it needs to be said.

me. I’m craving respect, dignity, and the excitement of whatever life will bring next along my path. And I leave with an even stronger conviction: I will fight harder for everyone, because everyone deserves to exist without having to erase themselves in order to feel safe, loved, and respected. Along my way here, I crossed paths with a few queer Palestinian people. I send them all my love, resilience, and courage. They are stronger than most of us could ever imagine.

Until Palestine is free.

Reflection About Leaving Palestine

Brume Marchombre

I’m a bit sad to leave, I’m not gonna lie. I truly love Palestine: the nature, the landscapes, the people, and the moments I shared here. I’m deeply grateful that I made it here. I’m proud of surviving as someone who belongs to multiple marginalized communities, and I’m proud that, despite everything, I still chose to travel, to stand with another oppressed people, and to support their freedom and dignity. Sometimes my little sister and I joke that we are "princesses by blood." (This is true.) I kept telling myself that a prince.ss doesn’t break, that they keep smiling even when they are bleeding. In a past life, someone close to me told me that it was nice because, right after they beat me, I smiled. But khallas, sometimes I don’t want to smile anymore.

I want to live. I overcame so many struggles just to be here: being stranded in Istanbul for two weeks because of the war, the financial stress, the gender issues at borders and airports, the canceled flights, the constant anxiety, the microaggressions about my gender, and even a physical attack that left me in a cast. There were moments when I truly thought I would break, but I stayed. Honestly, I’m really proud of myself for making it this far. My sister actually told me two weeks ago that I should stop pushing myself so hard, but I convinced her that I had a plan, that I had calculated everything, and that things would somehow work out.

One of my "calculations" was shaving my beard again. But every time I looked at myself on my phone screen or in a mirror, I felt disconnected from my own reflection. I knew I was doing it to protect myself: to avoid more violence, more stares, more humiliation, and more questions about my gender. But I did it to survive. And externally, everything became "easier." People were kinder, interactions were smoother, and I could move through spaces more safely. But inside, I didn’t feel like myself anymore. I felt like I was cutting away a part of my identity. For ten years, while working in the field, I have shaved my beard most of the time to reduce the violence and microaggressions I face. Sometimes I hide my face with scarves, even in my own countries. And maybe I was naive, but I truly believed that here, among people who know oppression so deeply, I could finally exist without hiding. I thought maybe people would understand. Maybe I could finally breathe and simply be myself. Yes, I'm still pathetic and stupid. "Hello darkness, my old friend."

Even as a child, I already suffered from ableism and racism in the suburbs of Paris, where I grew up. But I realized that even here, I still had to protect myself by becoming smaller. By erasing parts of myself. By dissociating in order to stay operational and emotionally functional. And dissociation is not a way to live. In order to allow myself to stay here, I started therapy sessions with a BIPOC therapist working in a humanitarian NGO because I needed at least one safe space where I could fully be myself. This situation also ruined something important for me personally. I wanted to try keeping my beard because, symbolically, it would have meant that maybe, in the future, I could finally exist more freely in other projects too, whether as an activist or as a professional. But no. I realized that if I want to continue doing activism, helping others, traveling, working as a PM, and living the life I want, then I need to become strong again. Because one day, if I keep disconnecting from myself all the time, I might lose myself completely.

And despite all of this, Palestine also gave me beautiful memories that I will carry forever. Some people were deeply kind to me. Sometimes people saw me as feminine-presenting (bouuuh, disgusting) and treated me with softness and respect, and those moments felt incredibly precious. I met people who showed generosity, humanity, and hope. I also witnessed so much resilience here that, in a way, it recharged me. Because every person here who decides to stay in their home and on their land is an activist. They are incredibly strong, and they matter. So I’m a lil' sad, but I’m also grateful.

And whenever I leave a project, if I become too sad or desperately want to stay, I start questioning myself. Am I irreplaceable? If yes, it is a red flag. Something is wrong. I am not irreplaceable. At the end of the day, I’m just someone who comes and goes, builds projects, and tries to support others as best as I can. I have no roots, but at the same time, I have roots everywhere. I just try to live fully while I still can. Because the life expectancy of queer BIPOC people is shorter than it should be. So I keep moving toward the places where life fulfills me.

So, in summary, honestly, I’m happy to leave because I want to become whole again. I want to be myself again. There are many new adventures waiting for